

# Critical dry conditions triggers - summary of discussion paper proposals

Refer to the ‘Critical dry condition triggers to reduce risk to environmental and human water needs’ discussion paper for background and context.

**Table 1. Proposed triggers that could initiate/lift temporary water restrictions in the northern Murray-Darling Basin**

Location for proposed trigger	Proposed trigger for implementing temporary water restrictions	Proposed trigger for lifting temporary water restrictions
<b>Wilcannia</b>	When there is a high confidence forecast cease-to-flow period of 120 days at Wilcannia (20ML/day at Darling River at Wilcannia 425008)	400 ML/day for 10 days (or 4,000 ML) is forecast
<b>Bourke</b>	When there is a high confidence forecast cease-to-flow for 60 days (0ML/day at Darling River at Bourke 425003)	972 ML/day for 10 days (or 9,720 ML) is forecast

Location for proposed trigger	Proposed trigger for implementing temporary water restrictions	Proposed trigger for lifting temporary water restrictions
<p><b>Menindee Lakes storage</b></p>	<p>Forecast to fall below 195 gigitalitres capacity<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>If releases have ceased below the Menindee Lakes, restrictions would not be lifted until the Lakes were forecast to have enough water to provide up to 12 months supply for human needs and allow the river to be restarted in a way that reduces the risk to water quality issues downstream and fish deaths. This will depend on conditions at the time and any operating constraints. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the Lower Darling River hasn't ceased to flow, triggers could be lifted once the Lakes are above 195 GL</li> <li>• If the Lower Darling River has ceased to flow, additional water above the 195 GL, such as 60 GL, may be required to restart the river<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• If evaporation rates are extreme and operational constraints require water to be held in inefficient lakes, more water will be required in the Lakes before the restrictions can be lifted.</li> </ul> <p>These may need further refinement following consultation.</p>
<p>All or most of the northern valleys and/or Barwon–Darling River system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AND/OR</li> <li>• Border Rivers - Macintyre at Goondiwindi (416201A)</li> <li>• Gwydir River - Mehi at Moree (418002)</li> <li>• Macquarie - below Warren Weir (421004)</li> <li>• Namoi - below Mollee Weir (419039)</li> </ul>		<p>Resumption of flow targets for each of the Northern tributaries such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3,600 ML over 7 days</li> <li>• 3,600 ML over 7 days</li> <li>• 21,000 over 7 days</li> </ul> <p>8,000 ML over 7 days</p>

<sup>1</sup> Where Menindee Lakes Storage has the same meaning as it does under the Murray-Darling Basin Agreement (ie. Total storage across all the lakes)

<sup>2</sup> A 60 GL Lower Darling River Flow Re-start allowance has been proposed to be included in the water sharing plan for the Lower Darling

---

## Implementing the temporary water restrictions

### Restrictions would be put in place when:

- Any of the cease-to-flow triggers are forecast to be reached at the associated locations
- or
- When the total storage volume of Menindee Lakes is forecast to fall below 195 GL.

### Restrictions would apply to:

- A, B and C class access in the Barwon–Darling
  - Floodplain harvesting in the Barwon–Darling and in northern valleys
  - Supplementary access in the northern tributaries and large unregulated river access in the lower northern valleys
- and

- Span the Barwon-Darling River and/or specific northern tributary management zone/water source indicated in the restriction order for where the cease-to-flow trigger has been reached.

For example, if the northern tributaries are in Drought Stage 4 criticality and/or extended cease to flow periods have occurred (regardless of whether the Barwon-Darling and Menindee Lakes triggers are met), a section 324 restriction may be placed in these systems until flow recovers. If a Barwon-Darling or Menindee Lakes trigger is reached, then restrictions will apply to the Barwon-Darling and all northern tributaries even if Drought stage 4 has not been declared/cease-to-flow periods have not occurred in the northern tributaries.

---

## Lifting the temporary water restrictions

### If total storage at Menindee Lakes has fallen below 195 GL restrictions would be lifted when:

- Total storage in Menindee Lakes was forecast to have enough water to provide up to 12 months supply for human needs and allow the river to be restarted in a way that reduces the risk to water quality issues downstream and fish deaths - A specific lifting volume trigger has not been suggested since the conditions at that time cannot be predicted. A decision to lift the restriction will take account of:
  - whether releases have ceased below Weir 32 – if so, then additional water such as 60 GL, will need to be forecast to reach the Lakes so that the river can be restarted in a way that minimises fish deaths and water quality issues.
  - evaporation rates – if evaporation rates are extreme then more water will need to be stored in the Lakes to last up to 12 months

- the specific lakes where the water is stored – advice from WaterNSW will be required at the time.

### **If total storage at Menindee Lakes has not fallen below 195 GL restrictions would be lifted when:**

- Any of the resumption-of-flow events at the proposed locations occurs – this is designed to protect the peak of flows as it moves down the river and provide access once the peak has passed. For example, if the northern tributary resumption of flow targets are met then consideration will be given to lifting restrictions in those valleys, however restrictions would continue to apply in the other trigger locations until the peak had passed.